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ABSTRACT

An initiative of the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the International Reading Association (IRA), Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) promotes classroom teaching practices that help students learn actively, think critically, and work cooperatively. It offers an integrated program of staff development, activities for teachers of the primary grades through high schools, and educators from teacher-training centers, school inspectorates, and national ministries. RWCT focuses on methods of teaching, rather than any particular curriculum. In each country joining the RWCT network, four volunteers from the IRA are assigned to work with the in-country coordinators. RWCT seeks to align its teacher education efforts with those in existing institutions and to develop collaborative relationships between and among professional groups of several kinds: higher education; teacher centers; professional development schools; ministries of education; and the professional community. RWCT training is presented in nine courses: a framework for active learning and critical thinking; methods for promoting critical thinking; reading/writing/discussion in every discipline; further strategies for promoting critical thinking; cooperative learning; lesson planning and assessment; writing workshop: from self-expression to written arguments; creating thoughtful readers; and becoming trainers. (PM)

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The READING & WRITING for CRITICAL THINKING Project

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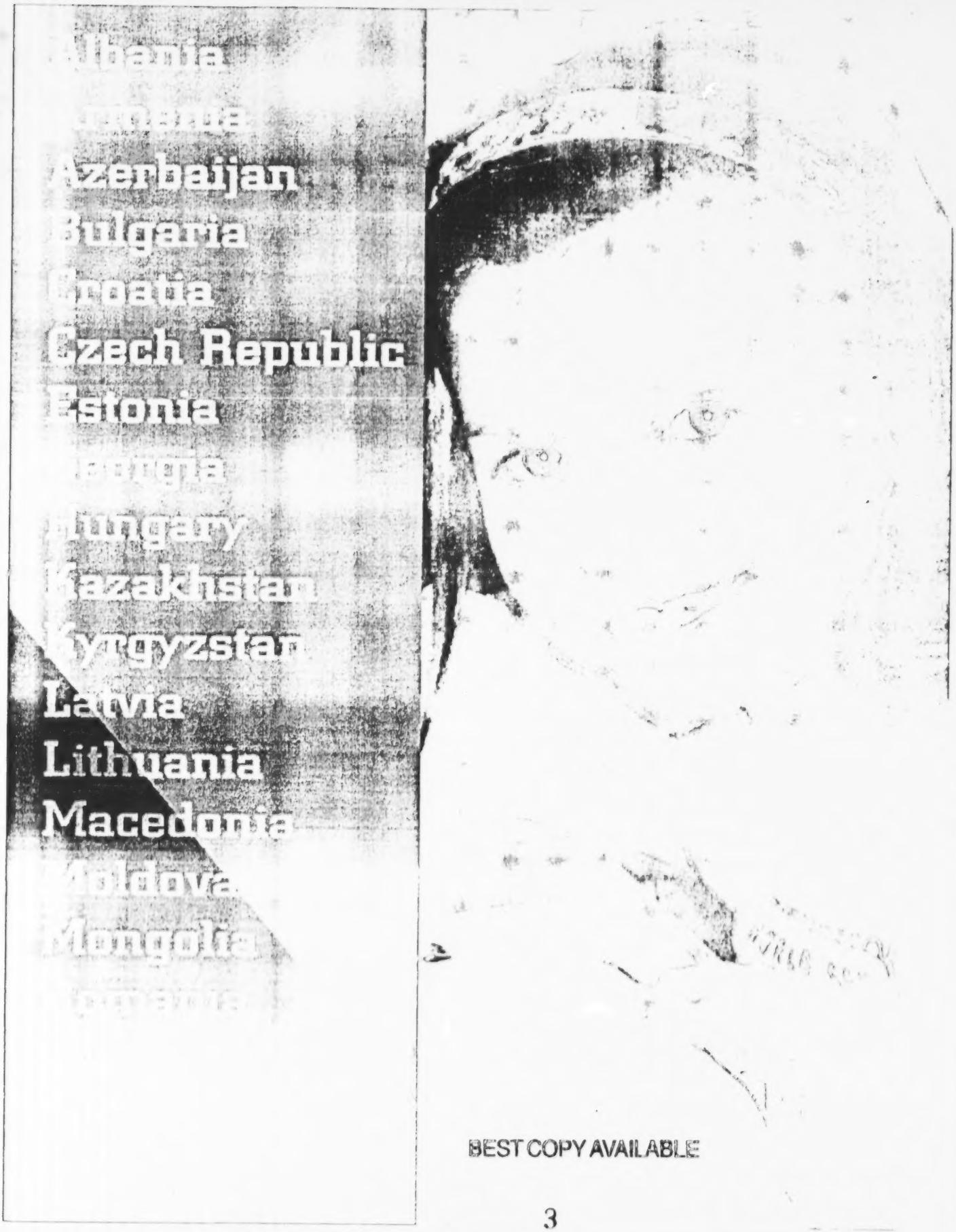

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Building open societies

The Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Project (RWCT) is based on the idea that democratic practices in schools play an important role in the transition toward more open societies. Active in 20 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, RWCT introduces research-based instructional methods to teachers and teacher educators. These methods are designed to help students think reflectively, take ownership for their personal learning, understand the logic of arguments, listen attentively, debate confidently, and become independent, lifelong learners. The program can be used in all grades and subjects with existing curricula.

The RWCT program is an initiative of the Open Society Institute (OSI), which promotes worldwide educational, social and legal reform, and the International Reading Association, a nongovernmental organization of professional educators. These groups work in close collaboration with the 20 national Soros Foundations in participating countries. Faculty from the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa, and the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, provide leadership and direction. In addition, RWCT enlists more than 70 professional educators who volunteer to serve in-country as workshop leaders, delivering a comprehensive series of professional activities to participants.

RWCT methods are adapted for classrooms in order to promote

active inquiry
student-initiated learning
problem-solving
critical thinking
cooperative learning
writing and reading processes
alternative assessments

"At RWCT workshops we learn to treat students as human beings who have their own experiences and knowledge to share."

RWCT participant, Ukraine

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Designed for many different settings and contexts, the RWCT framework is

- ***Classroom-based***
  Participants leave RWCT workshops ready to implement the strategies in their own classrooms.
- ***Flexible***
  RWCT is effectively implemented in primary and secondary classrooms, in pedagogical high schools, and in university classrooms, across many disciplines in 20 different countries.
- ***Adaptable to local conditions***
  RWCT is designed for use with existing curricula and existing materials.
- ***Designed to build local capacity***
  Mentored by a select group of international educators, RWCT builds a corps of skilled, in-country teacher trainers, giving each country the capacity for national expansion.

"Students appear to feel more comfortable using creative and higher order thinking."

–RWCT participant, Kyrgyzstan

RWCT institutionalizes change

In each country joining the RWCT network, four volunteers from the International Reading Association, experts in the methods they present, are assigned to work with the in-country leadership team. Participants for the project are chosen by the in-country coordinators. They typically represent university faculty, members of the district inspectorate of the Ministry of Education, trainers from inservice teacher training institutes, and outstanding classroom teachers, able to eventually demonstrate and teach these methods to others.

RWCT is based on a "train the trainer" model. Volunteers offer a series of five workshops over a 12 to 18 month period. During this time participants practice the methods demonstrated, adapt them to their own classrooms and circumstances, and substitute national texts for those introduced in training workshops. They also meet on a monthly basis with colleagues to discuss their progress, and are observed by peers and RWCT volunteers in the classroom. Although the volunteers are experts in the teaching methods they present, each realizes that local educators' knowledge is critical to the overall success of the project. RWCT is designed to invite modifications that resonate within each country.

In Year 2, the first generation participants begin to train other teachers. The cadre of trainers is increased as selected second generation participants also become part of the local leadership core. To increase the efficacy of the dissemination effort and to ensure institutionalization, an institutionalization strategy is developed within each country. In Year 3, volunteers work to support that particular strategy.

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RWCT institutionalizes change

RWCT seeks to align its teacher education efforts with those in existing institutions and to develop collaborative relationships between and among professional groups of several kinds:

Higher Education

Involving higher education faculty as program participants and advocates is a goal in every country. RWCT encourages teaching with and the endorsement of active methods in degree programs for teachers.

Teacher Centers

RWCT seeks to establish teacher training centers as sites for learning about and practicing active methods.

Professional Development Schools

In a number of countries, schools with a significant proportion of teacher educators familiar with RWCT methodologies serve as demonstration sites for both preservice and inservice teachers.

Ministries of Education

In nearly all of the countries in which RWCT operates, significant educational reforms are under way at the Ministry level. These teacher education reforms are often compatible with the goals and practices of RWCT. Through official endorsement by Ministries, teachers accrue credit for RWCT courses, and may eventually gain release time and other compensation for their RWCT work.

The Professional Community

As local associations and NGOs take increasing responsibility for RWCT, leadership opportunities, publications, and conferences develop. Thus the professional community is strengthened, and a forum for the exchange of information and ideas is created. For example:

- *Journal - In order to institutionalize a new professional culture and development opportunities in the region, a quarterly peer-reviewed journal,* The Thinking Classroom, *is produced and distributed in English and Russian. National language editions are also produced in select countries. For more information about the journal, visit the RWCT website at www.uni.edu/coe/rwct.*

- *Conferences - Opportunities to network with other education professionals and exchange experiences, research, and lessons learned through regional and national-level conferences are an integral part of RWCT's institutionalization efforts.*

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RWCT - maintains high standards

Monitoring and assessment are important components of every RWCT project. In conjunction with each training workshop, teacher educators visit participants' classrooms and meet to discuss implementation of the methods and strategies introduced. A number of rubrics have been developed to help assess progress and provide feedback.

After each visit by RWCT volunteers, a trip report detailing progress and setting out new goals is prepared and used by RWCT administrators and OSI staff to monitor the project. At present, a formal evaluation of the program is underway. Both teacher performance and student outcomes are being assessed.

Standards for RWCT certification for both teachers and trainers have been developed by an international board. Participants are awarded certification based on their understanding and practice of RWCT methods.

Before participants are certified as trainers they must present evidence of a working familiarity with RWCT methods as well as an understanding of the project's purposes. Many teacher trainers have created portfolios, videotaped lessons, collected student work samples, and engaged with more experienced staff in extensive interviews.

RWCT provides comprehensive training

RWCT training is presented in nine courses. The courses are delivered in five (4-5 day) sessions during a 12 to15 month period. Each of the first eight courses addresses teaching strategies. The ninth course focuses on becoming a trainer. The content of each methods course is described in a guidebook of 60 to 100 pages, which has been translated into the participants' national language (eighteen languages, at present).

The workshops are designed to model interactive instruction and learning. They are built around demonstration lessons, with opportunities for discussion, practice, and questions.

Course descriptions

1 *A Framework for Active Learning and Critical Thinking*

Presents the rationale for critical thinking and interactive learning, and demonstrates a research-based three-phase model for organizing teaching and learning. In phase one, students are encouraged to consider their assumptions about a topic, and frame their questions about it. In phase two, the lesson proper, students actively inquire into the topic. The third, "reflection" phase, encourages students to consider what they have learned and compare it to their prior assumptions, question and debate the claims of the material, consider its implications, think of the topic in different ways, or apply the ideas to new situations. In this course teachers learn a preliminary set of teaching strategies for applying this three-part model. By the time they have completed the course, they will have learned more than 60 such alternative strategies, for use with different materials for different purposes.

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2 *Methods for Promoting Critical Thinking*

Presents ways of using different levels of questions to evoke discussion. These range from "lower order" questions of fact and comprehension to "higher order" questions that ask students to use ideas to solve problems, compare different points of view, and evaluate responses.

3 *Reading/Writing/Discussion in Every Discipline*

Stressing the interrelatedness of the language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in an interactive classroom, the course focuses on techniques for all subjects that use reading and writing as means of learning. The course also demonstrates ways to enliven lectures with questions that heighten student engagement and original thought.

4 *Further Strategies for Promoting Critical Thinking*

Revisiting the RWCT project's three-part teaching model, this course presents further methods for use in all three phases. Here teachers learn strategies for encouraging discussion, strategies for debate and for the analysis of arguments, and ways of using these techniques to rehearse argumentative essays.

5 *Cooperative Learning*

Methods of cooperative learning help students learn material more thoroughly and deeply, and also cultivate respectful relationships among students. Cooperative learning techniques are introduced and reinforced throughout the courses. This course shares a host of strategies for giving students active roles in helping each other learn.

6 *Lesson Planning and Assessment*

As RWCT teachers seek ways to promote critical thinking and active learning at the same time they teach their standard curriculum, time is always a constraint. This workshop presents a lesson-planning model that allows teachers to teach the required content, and at the same time helps students to inquire and reflect. RWCT methodologies also help teachers who value independence and creativity to assess progress and assign grades.

7 *Writing Workshop: From Self-Expression to Written Arguments*

Personal writing offers students the opportunity to make meaning from experience, to form opinions, and to know each other more fully. This course shows teachers how to use a workshop approach to writing, and how to move students along the spectrum from writing about personal experiences to more disciplined exposition and argument. The course also addresses how writing can be used as an aid to inquiry and reflection. Writing workshops value the processes and conditions sought by real writers.

8 *Creating Thoughtful Readers*

This course shows teachers how to set up and conduct readers' workshops, which are intended to offer students a range of choices of what they read, while providing encouragement for deep reflection. The goal is to create authentic reading experiences and related discussions, to foster genuine inquiry, and to develop the habit of voluntary reading.

9 *Becoming Trainers*

It is expected that those trained in the RWCT methods will train others; but experience has shown that participants in workshops cannot become trainers without careful instruction in planning and conducting workshops. Participants leave this workshop with detailed plans for their first workshops and also with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they need to work with other adults.

"Students are taking more risks in learning and communicating."

-RWCT participant, Kyrgyzstan

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Institutions represented by RWCT volunteers

Australia
Deakin University, Ivanhoe, Victoria
Darvall Research and Consulting, Ltd., Rosanna, Victoria
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Bundoora, Victoria

Canada
Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario
University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia

Great Britain
King Alfred's College-Winchester, Winchester, England
University of Reading, Reading, England

United States
Alma College, Alma, Michigan
California State University-Dominguez Hills, Carson, California
California State University-Long Beach, Long Beach, California
California State University-Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California
California State University-San Bernardino, San Bernardino, California
City University of New York/Queens College, Dix Hills, New York
Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina
College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia
Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa
East Stroudsburg University, East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania
Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, Oregon
Harley School, Geneva, New York
Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York
Ingham Intermediate School District, Mason, Michigan
International Reading Association, Newark, Delaware
John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio
Kent State University, Kent, Ohio
Miami University of Ohio, Oxford, Ohio
Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan
Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Maryland
National-Louis University, Evanston, Illinois
National Writing Project, Berkeley, California
New Jersey City University, Jersey City, New Jersey
Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Illinois
Northwestern Illinois University, Evanston, Illinois
The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
The Sage Colleges, Troy, New York
Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri
University of Akron, Akron, Ohio
University of Alaska-Anchorage, Anchorage, Alaska
University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio
University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia
University of Illinois-Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
University of Maryland-Baltimore County, Baltimore, Maryland
University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada
University of North Carolina-Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina
University of North Carolina-Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina
University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa
University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma
University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi
University of Texas-Austin, Austin, Texas
University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah
University of West Florida, Pensacola, Florida
Utah State Office of Education, Salt Lake City, Utah
Washoe County School District, Reno, Nevada
West Chester University, West Chester, Pennsylvania
Williamsburg-James City School District, Williamsburg, Virginia

To learn more about RWCT

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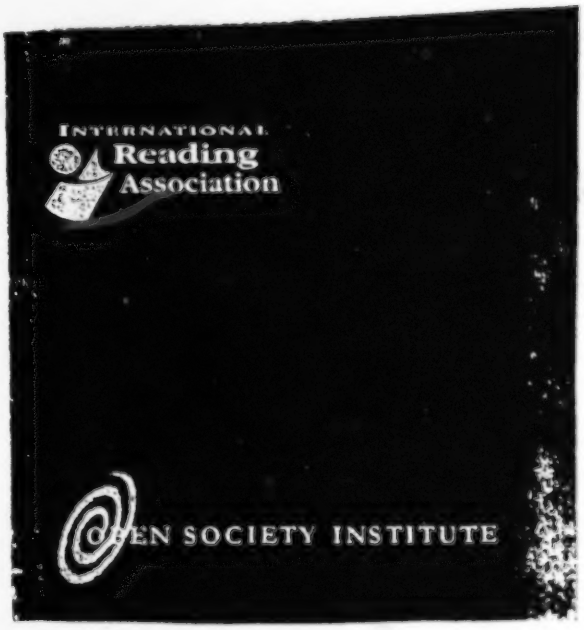

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